

SOS extends lifelines to homeless

By Casey Hans
staff writer

EVERYONE AT the South Oakland Shelter program has a tale to tell.

One 20-year-old woman recently gave a baby up for adoption, and needs support and a home. A family with two young children has a car, but no jobs or money. A few are street people. Others are just down on their luck temporarily.

None of them has a place to live.

"They've all got a different story," said Kathy Sutton, Christian Services coordinator for Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church in Farmington, which hosted the rotating emergency shelter program for one week in December. "A lot of these men have just hit a bad spot."

The SOS program rotates between 39 churches of various denominations throughout Oakland County. It was started in 1985, with a group of 18 churches serving 73 homeless people — averaging about 10 per night.

Today, up to 50 people per night are served throughout most of the year, and Lillian Schiele, a Farmington Hills resident, has been hired as the SOS program's full-time director. Thanks to an Oakland County grant, an office and intake center is now open in Royal Oak. Most churches host the homeless for one week.

THIS IS Our Lady of Sorrows first year participating in the SOS program. Sutton said the response has been overwhelming. Students from the church's associate elementary and junior high schools, plus parishioners, all volunteered their time and talent for the week-long parish project.

"Because of the school connected here, so many people wanted to help," she said. "We've had to hold people down."

Doctors from the parish offered their services, and several beauty salons came in mid-week to give free haircuts. Younger elementary students hand-decorated place mats to cheer the homeless visi-

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tors. The Mercyaire singing group from Farmington Hills Mercy High School entertained.

And students from Thomas Beahan Junior High, one of the schools associated with Our Lady of Sorrows church, served breakfast to the visitors each morning.

"They're poor and I wanted to help. They have no one else to help them," said seventh grader Jackie Rajkovich. "We did it to help them feel good."

Classmate Mike Piezia said he helped serve breakfast on several days, volunteering after learning about the parishwide project in his religion class.

"As soon as I said we were 'having company for Christmas,' they (the students) said, 'What can I do to help?'" said religion teacher Mary Jo McNamara. "They know it isn't fair. They've been especially moved."

"Every year we do service projects. We're very much aware of social conditions."

THE CHURCH hall in the basement of Our Lady of Sorrows Church was large enough to accommodate a living area with tables and television, and a separate sleeping area for the visitors. Because of the school nearby, they also had access to showers.

When the Observer staff visited the temporary shelter last Thursday, 25 people had stayed overnight in the church hall. About half the people had already left for work and others were waiting to be taken to the Royal Oak intake center. Various parishioners volunteered to be drivers for the week,



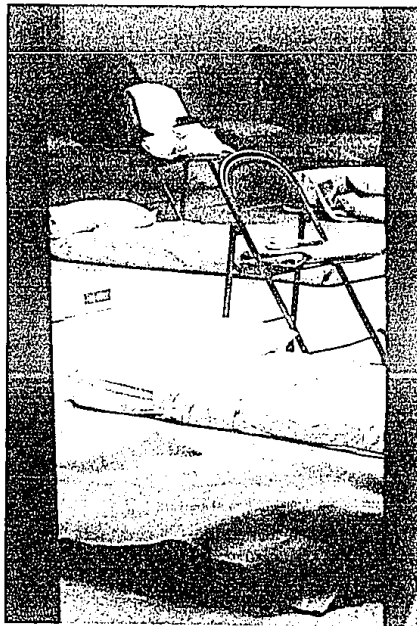
Photos by RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Students place serving utensils and food on the table set up to feed the homeless. From left are: Mike Piezia, Jon Kirkland, Julie James, Jackie Rajkovich, Jennifer Vaal and Carolyn Sanders. All are seventh graders.

bringing people to the shelter at night and taking them to their jobs or the center in the morning. The SOS program offers people three meals a day, a place to sleep and a caring heart.



Kate Kaiser of Farmington (center) adds sausages to a plate of pancakes for students Jennifer Vaal (left) and Jackie Rajkovich to serve.



A view of the shelter for the homeless set up in the basement of Our Lady of Sorrows church in Farmington.

Residents want quieter freeway

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before then, City Manager William Costick said.

Cost of the barriers will exceed \$1 million, with money coming from the state's vehicle weight and fuel taxes. The cost only covers basic noise barriers.

"THE NOISE level went up," said William Coleman, president of the Farm Meadows Homeowners Association. "There seems to be some variances in the way information is coming out of MDOT. We have received varying reports about what they are going to do with the barrier."

The N. Skye Drive resident would like to see metering devices record the sound level. He also suggested a 12-foot wall above the road level, not above the back-yard level.

Ralph Shony, also a N. Skye Drive resident, believes a berm already in place should be made higher.

Neither Neil Swicki nor Ralph Zerbonia of the Camdelt Courts Homeowners Association could be reached for comment.

In recently released information, MDOT states that:

• It will not build noise abatement where additional roadway improvements have been approved. Two areas along this portion of I-696

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(Tyler and east of Drake) are under study for possible future interchanges. Noise abatement at these locations will be analyzed when right-of-way requirements of the proposed interchanges are known.

• Noise abatement guidelines do not consider the assessed value of the property receiving the benefit.

• The number of affected units is determined by buildings or units within a certain predicted future noise contour. A residential area is considered an affected property if a building or its 25-foot outdoor area is within that predicted future contour.

• The wall design will be about \$200 to \$250 per foot for a 10- to 12-foot high noise wall of block or precast material. Higher cost materials for the project will be used if local

(city or private) money are provided. This local contribution would be in addition to the required local financial participation for the freeway widening and associated work.

MDOT ESTIMATES that more than \$1 million will be spent for noise abatement along I-696 between I-96 and US-24.

Several sites are slated for improvements. All plans are tentative. Barriers are targeted to serve:

• Three residences on the south side of I-696, east of Halsted. This would require a short earth mound extension of the existing mound in the I-696 right-of-way, increasing the height by four feet atop the existing earth mound at the I-696 right-of-way line. It would be on the south

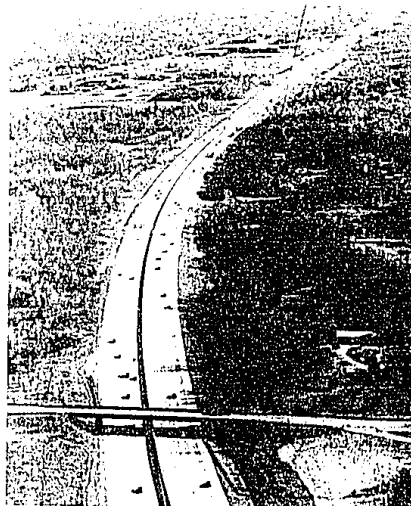
side of I-696 near Halsted. It's an earthen berm that is about one-tenth of a mile long. Completion by July.

• Three apartments on the north side of I-696, west of Orchard Lake Road. This would require a 10- to 12-foot-high noise wall at the I-696 right-of-way line. It would be a noise wall in the northwest quadrant of the Orchard Lake Road interchange. The approximate limits are from the pedestrian overpass four-tenths of a mile east toward Orchard Lake Road. Completion by July.

• Two adjoining subdivisions south of I-696, west of Inkster. This would require an earth berm rising 11 feet above the residential backyard ground. The berm will run 2300 feet along the area abutting the freeway. The project will require removing some I-696 and residential landscaping.

• Five homes on the north side of I-696, west of Tyler. This would require a 10- to 12-foot-high noise wall at the I-696 right-of-way line and is an extension of another noise wall. It will stop where the I-696 right-of-way drops into the ravine.

• Two apartments on the north side of I-696, at Franklin Road. This would require a 10- to 12-foot-high noise wall at the I-696 right-of-way line. The noise wall at Tyler will be defaced for five years due to the possibility of a new interchange there.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

An aerial view of the new section of I-696, the Walter Ruther Freeway.